



STATE OF WASHINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES

Economic Services Administration
Division of Child Care and Early Learning
P.O. Box 45480, Olympia, Washington 98504-5480

January 20, 2006

Dear Licensed/Certified Provider:

Last winter, providers and other child care stakeholders were invited to several statewide forums. We asked some basic questions about the Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) program:

- What works and what doesn't work with the WCCC program?
- What can we do to improve the program?

We received a large number of comments and suggestions. The Division of Child Care and Early Learning (DCCEL) and the Community Services Division (CSD) identified a few of the comments we could respond to more quickly than others. The underlined statement below reflects some of the concerns raised, followed by our position related to each point.

Providers wait a long time in call centers: CSD works with the WCCC Program through Customer Service Call Centers. The call centers have many service delivery models. They offer services for most programs including cash, food, medical and child care assistance. Statewide, the call centers handle on average about 9,000 calls a day for these programs. The calls are answered in an average of just over 4 minutes. At peak times, callers may wait longer. Each call center publishes a medical and child care phone number. This number offers direct services for providers. The most recent list of phone numbers is attached (see attachment A).

Verbal confirmations are not complete or accurate: DCCEL and CSD agree child care staff should not give verbal confirmation of child care payments. The WCCC handbook has been changed to instruct workers to not give verbal confirmation. Once payment has been authorized, a Social Service Notice is automatically mailed to the provider by the Social Service Payment System (SSPS). The notice should be received by the provider within 5 to 10 days. If you need to know before then you can:

- Call the Working Connections Information Phone (attachment B); or
- Ask the worker to fax a copy of the SSPS Authorization (Data Input Sheet) to you, or they can leave it at the reception desk for pick up.

Call centers do not always accommodate providers who do not speak English: Although we are not funded or required by state law to provide interpreters to providers, workers are encouraged to use this service for providers who do not speak English. The CSD maintains bilingual phone menus in call centers where 5% or more of the client base speaks a language other than English. For example, if 5% of the clients in an area speak Russian, Russian is included in the call center phone menu.

Not having a caseworker results in lower quality service and inconsistency: CSD has six regions. Regions design their service delivery within certain guidelines. Caseloads are not required. However, some regions chose to return to the caseload model.

DSHS does not properly educate parents: An approved WCCC parent receives a letter with their responsibilities. The responsibilities include payment of copayments and reporting changes. We are reviewing the parent letters to see what we can add to make these responsibilities more clear.

The parents are responsible to make payments when due, give provider notice and pick up children on time. In most cases WCCC parents should follow the same rules private-pay parents follow. For example, some providers have policies about payment due dates, late fees and giving notice of intent to stop using a provider. If the policies are in writing and are for all parents, the provider may apply the policy to the WCCC parent. The *Child Care Subsidies: A Booklet for Licensed and Certified Child Care Providers* explains when the provider may not charge the WCCC parent. For example, providers may not ask the parent to pay the difference in their rates and the DSHS rate.

DSHS should collect copayments from parents and providers who are not notified of copayment changes timely: DSHS does not plan to collect copayments on behalf of providers for two main reasons:

- Collecting copayments is a provider business responsibility, just as with collecting child care payments from private-pay families, and
- The high administrative state cost of establishing and maintaining this function for all WCCC families.

Copayments for an eligibility period, once established, do not change except for a few very specific reasons (such as if incorrect information was given at application or the parent loses employment and the copayment needs to be decreased). The award letter for providers indicates copayment amount for a set time period. Social Service Notices also include copayment information.

The following concern was expressed: "Any parent unhappy with having to pay fees has the ability to make false allegations to CPS." While DSHS knows this is unfortunate and stressful for providers, we do not believe it is unique to WCCC families. DSHS collecting the co-payment would not eliminate these false allegations.

Changes to the authorization are not communicated timely to providers: There appear to be three main issues regarding notifications. When child care:

- *Ends on an established end date*
When care is approved, a Social Service Notice is sent to the provider. The notice includes an end date for each line of service, or the last date the WCCC program will pay for care for a child. We do not expect a provider to accept a child past this date without verification the program will pay, or the parent makes arrangements for private payments.
- *Ends earlier than an established end date, plus payment for 2 weeks*
The WCCC handbook is changed to instruct workers to terminate the authorization the **same day** a termination letter is sent to parents. A Social Service Notice will

automatically be sent to the provider when this occurs. This should improve notice to providers when care ends earlier than expected.

WCCC does not plan to pay for two weeks notice when a WCCC parent leaves unexpectedly. If a provider has a policy to charge all families for not giving proper notice, the provider may apply this rule to WCCC families. For example, if any parent signs a contract stating they will give two weeks notice and they leave unexpectedly, the provider may bill the family. If it is a WCCC family there may be absent days the provider could bill as stated in the billing rules in Child Care Subsidies: A Booklet for Licensed and Certified Child Care Providers (DSHS 22-877), and bill the parent the remaining days.

- *Changes to the child care authorization occur*

The parent is responsible to notify their provider within 10 days when changes are made to their child care. If a parent uses more care than is approved, a provider may charge the WCCC family for this care. All parents are responsible to keep their provider informed of their child care needs, regardless of whether they are a WCCC family or a private paying family.

DSHS does not properly notify and educate providers on subsidy changes: When changes were made to the subsidy WAC in May 2004, DCCEL sent letters to licensed/certified providers. The letters listed some of the major changes and instructed providers where to get more information. When we change WACs we post the changes for comments. We notify the providers through a variety of ways such as sending the documents to the Resource and Referral agency, sending a message on the DCCEL listserve, and sending the documents to the two major provider associations.

Training on subsidy billing has been provided across the state for the last year. We plan to continue the trainings, and hope to increase the frequency and availability. We have also discussed making training on subsidy billing mandatory for all providers before subsidy payments can be authorized. The subsidy booklet was revised. We are working on a way to distribute the revised version to all licensed and certified providers. The revised English version can be found on the DCCEL internet site at <http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/esa/dccel/publications.shtml#22-877>.

We would like to thank everyone for their participation in this project. We will continue to work on the comments and suggestions in the coming months. When completed, a document with comments and responses will be available to providers and other child care stakeholders.

Sincerely,



Rachael Langen, Director
Division of Child Care and Early Learning

Attachment

cc: John Clayton